

## THE SNAKE CHARMER.

HOW THE ANACONDA IS SUBDUE.

## A WOMAN WITH BLACK EYES THAT CAN FASCINATE SNAKES AS WELL AS MEN.

There is something uncanny and repulsive about snakes. Perhaps it is because our maternal ancestor, Mother Eve, got herself and all her descendants into such a pile of trouble through one of them that the average man or woman feels such an instinctive repugnance for them. And it is, perhaps, because human nature is full of paradoxes and what repels also attracts, that the snake-charming woman is a necessary adjunct of a dime museum and always draws. There is something of the fascination exercised by a chamber of horrors about the spectacle of a woman with a big anaconda coiled around her waist.

The particular woman who attracted the attention of a reporter had a most romantic French name according to the flaming posters that adorned the outside of the show, but the reporter was confidently informed by the "animated skeleton" and the "missing link" that her name was "Mrs. Smith."

"It is a curious fact," said the skeleton, who was of a speculative turn of mind, "that a woman ain't considered no account at charming snakes unless she has a French or Roshan or Italian or some outlandish name. Call her Mrs. Smith an' she wouldn't be worth her board at the business, but call her Madame Choc-Jou-Jingey-somethin' from Mexico an' people just swarm to see her. Now skeletons can stand up under their own proper names an' draw, an' therefore I consider skeletons superior to snake-charmers."

At this moment the "skeleton" was seized with a fit of coughing so violent that it threatened to burst him asunder, and while the "link" adhesed to him a wretched but vigorous pounding on the back, the reporter took advantage of the opportunity to withdraw and seek the snake-charming woman. She was seated on a chair and a big anaconda was wound once around her waist, the rest of its length lying loose in her lap. In her right hand she held the snake's ugly head. She was a blonde and handsome enough to charm anything. The reporter measured something to that effect.

"Yes, you had better speak low when you pay me compliment," she replied, her eyes twinkling mischievously, "for the giant over there is my husband. He's awfully jealous and when he gets mad he weighs ten times as much as he does now."

"Ah, there's a little dude disposed to be fathoms, is that a-a-worm, dunchee know?"

"No, it's a-a-washer, dunchee know, would you like to try how it can a-a-hach?" responded Mrs. Smith, alias Madame Jeanette De La" etc., with excellent mimicry.

The dude dropped his eyeglass and became deeply interested in the Egyptian mummy.

"Don't speak, please," she said earnestly.

She moved the hand which held the snake's head until the head was pointing straight at her face. She then fastened her lustrous black eyes on the two small treacherous eyes of the snake. Her eyes seemed to expand and the snake's to get smaller. Superbly, she looked; her features and whole bearing seeming to express intense mental effort. The reporter measured again, at first, to avoid her gaze; then he ceased staring and its head drooped, limp and listless in her hand.

"Now you may speak," she said.

"That was very pretty."

"Oh, indeed, there was no 'take' about that. If I hadn't mastered the snake he would have whipped his tail into that third loop he was forming and squeezed me until my bones cracked unless somebody came to my assistance and cut him off in a few. A bear can't hurt tighter than an anaconda can squeeze. This is only the third time that I have performed with this snake, and he is disposed to be ugly unless I look after him. While I was chattering my eyes went off him and I suppose he felt there was an opportunity to exercise what he regarded as his legitimate business. You observe that I always hold the snake by the head so that I can compel it to look me in the face. Then when I get my eyes off it I can subdue it."

"How?"

"Ah, that's more than I can tell you. What causes the bird or the mouse that I feed to the snake to become powerless when the snake fastens its eyes on it? What is it that enables one man to mesmerize another? All I know is that I look at the snake's eyes and will it, with all my might, to yield to me. When I do that I seem to feel something going out from me—electricity—magnetism—I don't know what. I feel afterward as though I had engaged in a physical struggle with something and conquered. There's where the pleasure comes in. You may not believe it, but when I concentrate my will to subdue that snake the excitement is intense—the enjoyment exquisite. I suppose it is something like what a soldier feels when the music plays as he marches to battle."

"How do you acquire that power?"

"It isn't acquired; it's born. Many people possess that power, undoubtedly, who don't know of it. Quite accidentally I found that I had it. I never had that fear of snakes that most people have. When quite a girl I noticed some children running from a garter snake. What possessed me to do it I don't know, but I picked it up, fastened my eyes on it, and found myself willing it to submit. Then it fell into a sort of stupor, and I found that I could do with it what I liked. This discovery that I could subdue the snake so that it became entirely passive in my hands, pleased me. I began to experiment with other and larger snakes, always selecting, of course, snakes that are not venomous. Then when circumstances took a turn so that I had to earn my own living, I took to the business. It pays to do better than sewing or school teaching or selling dry goods."

"How do you manage to work with an anaconda?"

"I first give it a bath of warm milk. This it seems to enjoy hugely, and isothiodated by it and gets laundied. Then I try to get it into a position where I can fasten my eyes on its eyes. This often requires a great deal of patience, for the snake tries to avoid it, seeming to feel that it means a contest with it. It will get wretched. But the opportunity comes at last, and when the snake drops its head listlessly I know that I have charmed it and can safely put my hand on it. The next operation is easier and the snake is more quickly rendered passive. With each operation it becomes more docile until I can perform with it in public. But always one has to be careful, for the snake is liable at any time to try squeezing. You can tell by the way it moves its coils when it is going to do that, and can then char or mesmerize it until it is passive; but if you are frightened and get bewildered you can't easily control even the snake, and the snake will generally try to catch you if it has had one or two narrow escapes through carelessness. The worst place to have a snake is around your neck, because it takes very little squeezing there to make you feel exceedingly uncomfortable. Women can stand a great deal more than you think."

"I should say so; they require a great deal more than a baby. They are so liable to catch cold when confined. You have to throw warm blankets over them and expose the parts of the body that are most likely to catch cold. Then they are mighty particular what they eat. The only things that seem thoroughly agreeable with them are white mice and guinea pigs, and you can't find these here to give to them alive. The snake does not care for dead mice, however, and these have to be given to it raw unless it can first charm the animal or find it.

The snake charmer observed the giant slithering toward his wife and concluded that he had about exhausted the subject, anyhow, and would be off to inspect the tattooed lady. Subsequently the manager of the "Anaconda" had one more pleasant surprise, charmed and rendered passive a mad bull that was charging on a crowd of women and children. But the "Skeleton," who overheard the conversation, while simultaneously at the reporter, which led him to conclude that the manager was romancing.

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